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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 001719

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF DAS YAMAMOTO AND AF/E
DJIBOUTI FOR A/S DR. FRAZER
LONDON, PARIS, ROME FOR AFRICA WATCHER

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TAGS: PREL PTER MOPS ET SO
SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: FOREIGN MINISTER TELLS ABIZAID
ETHIOPIA'S PREPARED RESPOND TO UIC PROVOCATION

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES VICKI HUDDLESTON FOR REASONS
1.4 (B,D)

¶1. (C) Summary. Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin met with Commander, U.S. Central Command General John Abizaid and the Charge June 19 to discuss the GOE's growing military force along the Somali border and its warning to the UIC that any perceived threat will be met with military action. Seyoum stressed the need to stop the momentum of the UIC and protect the TFG. He said Ethiopia has national security interests on the border and it will respond if provoked by the UIC. He continued by saying that if fighting occurs and if Ethiopia intervenes, then nothing will stop Ethiopia from going to Mogadishu. End Summary.

WILL NOT ALLOW A FUNDAMENTALIST GOVERNMENT TO THREATEN
ETHIOPIA

¶2. (C) When asked by General Abizaid about the dynamics of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), the Foreign Minister said we need to keep strong lines of communication between the United States and Ethiopia. He said Ethiopia is frustrated that there was no strategic consultation with Ethiopia on Somalia. He stressed that at least consultation should occur. Seyoum added that there does not necessarily need to be agreement, but we should at least talk. Seyoum said the situation in Somalia has backfired. The UIC, he noted, rely on sub-clan militias. The Foreign Minister added that, "there are only a few who follow the radical Islamic ideology and Ethiopia knows who they are. These are people who have been in Afghanistan and trained there. These individuals are fully exploiting the current situation in Somalia. They are taking advantage of the total collapse of the state structure. The UIC now provide minimal services such as schools, food, and security. The UIC is now winning at gaining hearts and minds in Somalia."

¶3. (C) Concerning Ethiopian intentions in Somalia, Seyoum stated he had brought some "hardliner" UIC representatives to Addis Ababa for discussions on at least two occasions (the last time being June 17-18). He explained how Ethiopia communicated a clear message to stop military expansion, and told the hardliners the forces in Beledweyne need to pack and go back to Mogadishu. If the TFG is attacked, Seyoum said,

Ethiopia will intervene regardless of the response from the international community. Seyoum told the General that the UIC response was they would pull back and they would not go to Baidoa. Seyoum said Ethiopia is not over estimating or over exaggerating the threat, however. According to the Minister, Ethiopia has under estimated the threat. He added that Somalia is in absolute chaos with between 50,000 to 80,000 armed militia, even if the estimate is only having this figure there is problem. Additionally, the Somalia coast is open thus giving free access to extremists.

¶4. (C) Abizaid asked Seyoum if Ethiopia is concerned that an Ethiopian military intervention could strengthen the UIC. Seyoum responded Ethiopia could not allow a fundamentalist government that threatens the Ogaden. He commented the "useless" warlords are out and this could be a blessing in disguise. He stressed the need to stop the momentum of the UIC as it is moving region to region and especially if it targets the TFG. He noted the UIC is not monolithic and that fractures will likely emerge. He said Ethiopia has national security interests on the border. General Abizaid asked who is helping the UIC. Seyoum replied Eritrea has no money to provide. Seyoum surmised that it is difficult to know, but Libyan and Egyptian support would not be logical. Seyoum thought that wealthy Islamic NGOs out of religious obligation would provide support.

TFG 'LAME DUCK,' NEEDS ARMS EMBARGO LIFTED

¶5. (C) The Foreign Minister said the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) is a lame duck government because it lacks international support and this support is not coming. He said the TFG has tried its level best to divide the groups

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comprising the UIC. According to Seyoum, the TFG sees Somalia under the rule of law, a secular society, and fighting terrorism. But, Seyoum noted, it was unilaterally disarmed due to the UN Security Council arms embargo. Seyoum commented that the TFG must have the ability to establish its own security forces assisted and armed by foreign countries. Seyoum said the UN Security Council report stated the UIC get arms from foreigners. Seyoum stressed the U.S. and Ethiopia need to coordinate efforts to assist institutions and defend them and not allow them to collapse again.

¶6. (C) The Charge commented there is slow movement on strategic issues and noted differences on how to protect the TFG: an IGAD force, African Union declaration, and/or neighboring countries to send troops. Seyoum responded by saying there is a problem if IGAD is not there and the militants move toward Baidoa. This would result in the dismantling of the TFG, and then there would be no choice but to intervene and fight the UIC. He said Ethiopia is doing the best thing: closely monitoring the situation and reinforcing the border. Having the UIC is okay, says Seyoum, though it is not comfortable. He added that having the UIC in Beledweyne and Baidoa is unacceptable, however. He continued by saying that if fighting occurs and if Ethiopia intervenes, then nothing will stop Ethiopia from going to Mogadishu.

¶7. (C) The Minister said the problem currently is the timing, capability and desire of various countries to send troops. Ethiopia has the capability to move quickly. Uganda cannot move without international funding. A declaratory statement would be helpful. Ethiopia does not want undermine the UN by intervening, but it cannot sit back. Washington argues that foreign troops will unite Somalia, but forces have already united under the UIC. We cannot allow Somalia to become a safe haven. Qanyare is negotiating to sell his weapons to the UIC and transfer the money to banks in Djibouti.

HUDDLESTON